The IDLER

Public Occurrences, Comment, Excursions & Rational Entertainment

Nr 29 MARCH 1967 25c THE COPY

One More for 1968

LINDSAY THE LONER

In Which it is Requested That the Floor be Reopened for Nominations; Cousin Barnegat Becomes a China Watcher; Charlie McDowell Drives Home; Poetry by George Ellis; as Well as Several Other Diversions.

As 1968 approaches, it becomes ever more clear that we are to be presented with presidential alternatives about as appealing as the choice between a rotten peach and a moldy slice of bread. The establishment Democrats call upon us to have faith in an administration that is war-crazed, conniving and utterly mendacious. The non-establishment Democrats are carrying on a demisemi-requited love affair with Bobby Kennedy, whose new-found liberalism appears to originate in a computer under the influence of a rather machiavellian programmer. And the Republicans bombard us with a collection of candidates who have all the reliable consistency of silly putty. They are not even politicians of compromise for they have not sufficient conviction to make compromise necessary. They are, rather, men of convenience. Spokesmen of the now.

In such distressing political circumstances, it does not seem unreasonable to propose that the floor be reopened for nominations, that we be given another chance before we finally repeat the error of 1964 and leave ourselves to pick between the patently offensive and the patently absurd.

If the motion is seconded and agreed to, I would submit that the first name we should add to the list is that of the mayor of New York, Mr. Lindsay.

That John Lindsay is not among the generally considered presidential contenders is not surprising. He has always stood apart from his political contemporaries, easy to miss over there in the corner. He has never been one to join the club. Or a stampede.

In 1959, less than a month after Lindsay took his seat in the House of Representatives, senior GOP congressman Noah Mason of Illinois delivered a vicious attack on the Supreme Court. When Mason had concluded and when not a single legislator of either party rose in defense of the justices, greenhorn Lindsay stood up--despite a seldom ignored tradition that freshman members do not publicly criticize senior legislators -- and told the House that Mason was wrong and that "this Supreme Court is one of the great courts" of our country's history.

It was a trivial thing, yet important too, for it set a pattern. From Noah Mason to Robert Moses, Lindsay has shown a contempt for rusty political traditions and rusty traditional politicians.

And he has never lost his willingness to stand alone.

On several occasions, Lindsay cast

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The Idler

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the sole GOP vote in the House against legislation granting the Post Office additional censorship powers. When the draft came up for extension in 1963, he was among a handful of legislators calling for major revisions. He was one of a small and repeatedly unsuccessful group that attempted to transfer the misused powers of the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities to the House Judiciary Committee. He was one of only nine House Republicans voting for the creation of a department of housing and urban development in 1965. And he was among those tragically rare creatures: Republicans who disavowed their presidential candidate in 1964.

In his short career as mayor Lindsay has assaulted such institutions as Consolidated Edison, the New York Stock Exchange, the Irish aristocracy of the New York City police department, the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, and Nelson Rockefeller. His successes in these confrontations have been mixed, but he has come out of them far better than many had expected. Furthermore, he must be granted considerable credit for even having the nerve to try. One can almost forgive him for including topless waitresses among his foes.

Political independence is a crucial part of the Lindsay philosophy. "I have always admired Oliver Wendell Holmes," he said once, "I suppose for one particular reason: he was a very independent guy. I believe that's the way I have to act and serve. I have no power base. I command no political clubhouses. I simply know that I have to stay close to the people. That's where I belong. And that's where I intend to stay."

There is, to be sure, a certain quixotic quality to the man. But this appears to be almost an occupational hazard for anyone who would attempt seriously to revive the metropolis once well described as "the heaviest city in the world."

The most striking thing about Lindsay the loner is that he has been most isolated when he has sought to broaden or preserve personal liberties. Among possible presidential candidates, he has the deepest realization of the need of Americans to be protected from America, of the require-

MOSES: Since Mason

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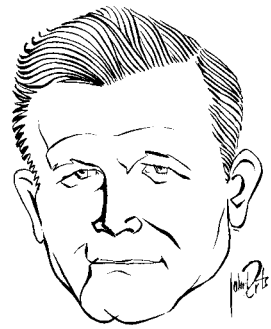
ment for a counterforce against the mindless pressures of a mass society upon the individual.

It is sometimes said that Lindsay's approach to these matters is trite and shallow. Noel Parmentel, Jr., in his Esquire article, "John V. Lindsay--Less than Meets the Eye," suggested that Lindsay could "easily pass muster as a scoutmaster in Peoria."

But Murray Kempton had an effective reply to this critique in one of the best pieces yet produced on the New Yorker (New York Review of Books, Oct. 25, 1965):

"That is quite true; still he is the scoutmaster of a very small troop; he is pious towards things about which other politicians are only blasphemous; if three hundred members of the House are banal about compulsory prayer, and Mr. Lindsay persists in being banal about the First Amendment, then he becomes a precious piece of goods indeed."



One might ask those liberal Democrats looking fondly at Robert Kennedy, for example, whether such banality is not preferable to indifference, say, in the matter of wiretaps. And it is instructive to recall that it was Lindsay who had to browbeat Kennedy into active support of a police review board.

The Lindsay conception of the way the individual should be treated in our society might have more force if the mayor did not make an unconvincing attempt to connect it with Republicanism. Still, Lindsay is one of the few contemporary politicians who has actively set about to change his party. That he should avoid scaring his compatriots by speaking of reaffirmation rather than of revolution is at least understandable.

"As a Republican," he said a number of years ago, "I see my task in Congress as that of redefining the role of the individual in our half-garrison, part-welfare state."

"To me," he told a reporter last fall, "the fact that the Republican leaders in Congress and I were at constant odds, reflects only one thing: I was in step with the times and they were not. I am a Republican, and not a Democrat, for quite basic reasons. I believe deeply in individual liberties, in governmental checks and balances, and in the historic power of the private sector of our economy. The Democrats do not aggressively disbelieve in such concepts: they just believe them less seriously than they should. They think more in terms of blocs than in terms of individuals. And the great cities of the nation find them, in most cases, acting as captives or agents of special pressures."

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KENNEDY:Computerized ?

If one removes the Republican mumbo-jumbo from that statement (it will be interesting to know what Lindsay's thoughts are on the "historic power of the private sector of our economy" after he gets through battling with Con Edison), there is a valid charge here. We need only glance at the sad history of the war on poverty to see how little the Democratic Party cares about saving the individuals floundering at the cores of our cities. Tammany Hall and the Cook County machine come first; the people second, if there is anything left over. Or review the record of urban renewal, or the slow eradication of the small farmer and the small businessman, or the massive power of labor unions at the expense of the unemployed, or the tortoise-paced evolution of Negro rights in the South timed so as to disrupt the Democratic power base there as little as possible. In many ways, the Democratic Party is the victim of its own most powerful supporters.

Lindsay has, on the whole, avoided power concentrates. There is more than a little of the populist in him that leads him to do battle with such forces. During the transit strike, he called them "the power brokers." When a reporter asked Woody Klein, the mayor's press secretary, to identify them, Klein replied, "They know who they are." And Lindsay himself, when asked such a question once, replied with a smile and a reference to the last president heavily tinged with populism: "Did Harry Truman ever name the 'special interests' he was fighting?"

In truth, Lindsay has named them many times: an overbearing governmental bureaucracy, bloated labor unions, big business, the proliferators of police power. "I think," he told a television audience in 1964, "that individual freedoms are the most important element that make up a human being's political posture." Lindsay's record is remarkably consistent in its concern for the small we over the big they.

Liberals, with their loyal yet in many ways unrewarding predisposition towards Democrats and Kennedys, could well afford to take a gamble on Lindsay. As an activist, a progressive, an advocate of international reason, an innovator, and a man with a strong understanding of the human drive for decency and justice, he stacks up well against anything the Democrats have to offer. There are genes in the Lindsay philosophy, which if paired with a Democratic congress, might produce an unusually vibrant political creature.

Furthermore, with Lindsay would come at least partial relief from the deadening effect of the cynicism that infects the Democratic leadership from Johnson to Kennedy. Part of the beauty of Lindsay is that he has not only produced measurable changes in his city, but has revived its spirit.

Murray Kempton foresaw, even before the mayoralty election, the possibility of this:

"Now the worst thing about the urban condition may not be that it is ugly or that it is decaying but rather that there is absent from it simple civility. What would be real then is not the housing issue or the traffic issue but the damaged

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dignity of the person. We live without notable protest with a Department of Welfare, which accepts as a duty and claims as a right the unannounced midnight visit to the mother it suspects of concealing the able-bodied man in her house in order to justify her claim to an Aid-to-Dependent-Children grant. We need only think a moment of this scene to see at once that Mr. Lindsay might be an inappropriate mayor in every respect but the single most consequential one. "

America is not much better off than its largest city. It needs civility. The nation's heart needs to leap a bit, and a Lindsay presidency might just be a good stimulus.

To be sure, the new Republicanism of Lindsay falls far short of the drastic changes required in our political attitudes if we are to produce a truly just and progressive society. Still, it compares favorably with the old liberalism of the Democrats, even in its bigger, flashier and more articulate manifestation in the person of Robert Kennedy. The Democrats--and Kennedy as much as any of them --are committed to power blocs such as unions and defense industries which create almost insurmountable inertia for progressive forces to overcome.

A bet on Lindsay has innumerable risks, but no more, I suspect, than the more popular liberal wager on Mr. Kennedy. For Senator Kennedy has yet to prove that his liberalism can stand more than moderate contact with expedience. His past does not suggest that our civil liberties will be strengthened under his protection. And once cannot foresee the senator dramatically challenging traditional power relationships in this country.

It would be nice to be able to choose better than Lindsay, but our system, with its profound bias towards the political center, offers little hope of radical national leadership. Within the restrictive choices open to us, Lindsay may well offer the best chance to shake the system up a bit. And that, at least, is a start.

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The McDowell Papers

By Charles McDowell, Jr.

Driving home the other evening in the last dark hour of Washington's exhilarating three-hour rush-hour, I was in the right lane watching a car ahead in the left lane flashing a right-turn signal. I lay back to give it room, and we proceeded in this formation for several miles on a high-speed parkway while the radio told me about the government's new standards for vehicle safety.

The National Traffic Safety Agency said the new standards were "realistic." Ralph Nader said they were "meaningless." The driver behind me became impatient and focussed his brights on my rear-view mirror.

Fumbling for the little toggle that dims the reflection, I took my eyes off the road momentarily and almost smashed into the car ahead in my lane. That car was slowing down for some reason.

The car just to my left--the one with the flashing right-turn signal --honked indignantly to let me know that I was driving like some kind of nut. The indignant driver was a woman wearing a hat built like a race horse's blinders.

My lane of traffic came to a halt, and the radio said that Dr. William Stieglitz was resigning in protest from the safety agency because the new standards were "totally inadequate."

To warn the cars behind me that our lane was all set up for one of those chain reactions of rear-end collisions, I decided to flip the new-fangled switch that causes all the car's lights to start blinking.

This switch is located ingeniously in the glove compartment. To reach it I had to unfasten my safety belt.

As I opened the glove compartment, the cars ahead suddenly began to move again. The car behind tooted impatiently, and I accelerated. When the car lurched forward, a great cascade tumbled out of the glove compartment--pliers, screwdriver, three tennis balls, a can of peanuts, some maps, a toy boat, and, of course, the flashlight that I always carry for safety.

A voice on the radio said seat belts would be required on all cars in 1968. I realized that my seat belt was not fastened.

The buckle of my seat belt somehow had got wedged into the crack in the front seat. I tried to extricate it, all the while watching the road, and hurt my hand on the pliers.

Now our lane of traffic was going good again, and I had come up behind the car with the blinking right-turn signal. Watching the blinking car in the left lane and the stop-and-start situation in the right lane, I probed for the safety-belt buckle and got a grip on it.

The problem now was to hitch up the belt, but that required taking both hands off the wheel. After three tries, one of which was interrupted by the car just ahead in my lane cutting

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over in front of the blinking car in the other lane, I managed it. (I am still waiting, incidently, for the federal statistics on accidents that occur while a driver is trying to buckle his safety belt.)

Soon the car with the blinking right-turn signal took an exit to the left, and I sneaked off on the right three exits before my regular one. Then I drove home in peace behind a moving van--and I stayed behind it, feeling shielded, even when it stopped a couple of times to ask directions.

The experience with traffic safety on the parkway had been one of the most harrowing that I had undergone for several days.

The most harrowing had occurred on a street near the Senate Office Building when a preoccupied pedestrian stepped out from between parked cars, and I almost ran over him. It was Ralph Nader.

Imagine it. It's enough to make a man take a the bus.

(Copyright, Newsday, 1967)

Negation is a way of saying Yes,
Of bracing sanity to admit a must;
Your desire is obvious in the fear you stress.

When we refuse to dare excess
To drain a dram of liquid lust,
Negation is a way of saying Yes.

As I attempt a warm caress
To tame your trauma of wounded trust,
Your desire is obvious in the fear you stress.

When trees of suspended confetti are less
Their palette tones by a shearing gust,
Negation is a way of saying Yes.

And if I frown at a tousled tress
Because it fell not by passions' thrust,
Your desire is obvious in the fear you stress.

Suppose we wear love's brightest dress
And deny we were separate segments of dust,
Then our negation is a way of saying Yes
To desire oblivious of the fear you stress.

--George Ellis

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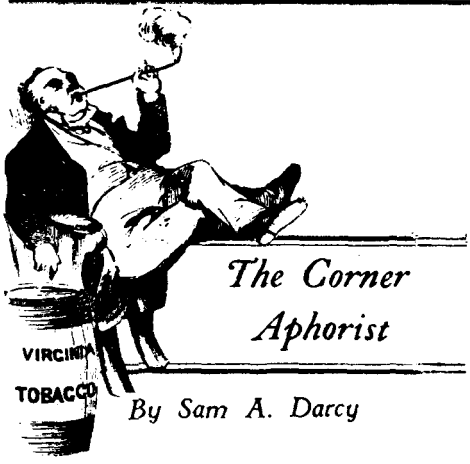

The Corner Aphorist

By Sam A. Darcy

☞Before the era of Iron Chancellors and fierce-eyed Fuehrers, Germany produced men of charm and wit. Wilhelm Busch, 19th century poet, was one. He noted the then current criticism of German youth by the elders (much like ours today) and commented:

Youth should heed the older witted
When they say, "Don't go too far"--
Now their sins are all committed
Lord, how virtuous they are!

☞The Prussians were then introducing the crew haircut, the ramrod back, pressures for conformity, heroic postures, suspicion of everything not appropriately mediocre. They needed all that to serve their new passion--messianic militarism. Now that this disease is spreading in our country we make the same demands on our youth. And they are resisting in odd and unusual ways. Good to them!

☞Someone once asked Disraeli, "What is the difference between disaster and catastrophe?" "See now," he answered, "if Gladstone were to fall into the Thames it would be a disaster, but if anyone were to rescue him, that would be a catastrophe." We have gone from isolationnism, a disaster, to becoming the world's worst busybody, clearly a catastrophe.

☞In a world of revived national pride and national self-improvement, the Pentagon is spending our lives and wealth pursuing a peculiar kind of internationalism, that of world censor, policeman, and bully.

☞From the New York Times, Jan. 31, 1967 (reporting on the Japanese elections): "The Democratic Socialists, a moderate Leftist party, won 30 seats for a gain of 70." That new math is driving us nuts!

☞Cousin Barnegat called to say that listening to LBJ on Vietnam, it is difficult to grasp whether he is talking about a peaceful solution or a ceaseless pollution.

☞The weatherman predicted snow flurries and he was right--there were 12 inches of it. Cousin Barnegat, stuck on his chickenless chicken farm wanted to be of service, so he andthe Mrs. made notes for us of the week's outstanding news reports of experts on China.

Monday: (Dateline Tokyo). Mao's own story on where he stands. He said in an exclusive interview with a far-hearing correspondent: "I was standing on a street corner, minding my own business, putting up my wall posters, when suddenly I disappeared."

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Tuesday: Teng shot.

Wednesday: Chu Teh denounces Tau Chu--or maybe it was the other way. In any case, it proves something, and we will tell you what as soon as we find out.

Thursday: Teng declared: "I died under mysterious circumstances. "

Friday: (By secret correspondent): When asked what was the chief result of their 200 mile march, the Red Guards replied, "Our feet hurt. "

Saturday: Our special analyst in Washington pointed out that the chief contenders over Maoism in China were Liu and Lin. The difference is the u and the n. Mr. Thant in New York, however, denies that the un is involved. It is, to quote the great Winston Churchill, a riddle wrapped in an enema.

Sunday: (Dateline Hong Kong) Chinawatchers, taking a hard look through their peep holes in a local border fence, have come to the firm conclusion that something is going on in China. It is difficult to know what, however, those wall posters are covering up the peep holes on the other side.

Further news bulletins as they break.

☞ There are those who think that the turmoil in China makes her easy prey for her enemies. They don't know history. When European governments, thinking that the French Revolution was falling apart made moves to attack France, they were shocked to receive such blows in return for the next fifteen years as destroyed most of them and changed the face of Europe. When Hitler, believing that Stalin had beheaded his best generals and the Russian Revolution was falling apart, attacked in 1941 (with all his Wehrmacht plus 42 divisions recruited in the conquered countries) he began his own destruction. Our World Almanac reads:

MAO: "I disappeared"

June 21, 1941: Hitler declares war on the Soviet Union.

July 31, 1941 (40 days later): The Red Army counter-attacked and threw back the enemy inflicting heavy losses and capturing much material and prisoners at Smolensk on the Moscow front. This is 1st German defeat in World War II.

Feb. 2, 1943 (19 months later): The Nazi surrender at Stalingrad.

Maybe, if West Europe had been falling apart in the way they described the Russian Revolution, they could have won some battles too and Hitler might have been stopped at the start.

The lesson for today, dear children, is don't fool around with a revolutionary people and that includes the Chinese Revolution. It's dangerous, often self-destructive. There is a power there few understand. Let them alone. Some day they may become our friends.

Of course, we have an alternative. We can do what we did after the Russian Revolution of 1917: spend 50 years, many lives and hundreds of millions of dollars in bitter hostility and, having gained nothing and lost much by that policy, end up wooing the USSR to use its good offices when our own Messianic Militarists get us in trouble, as we are in Vietnam.

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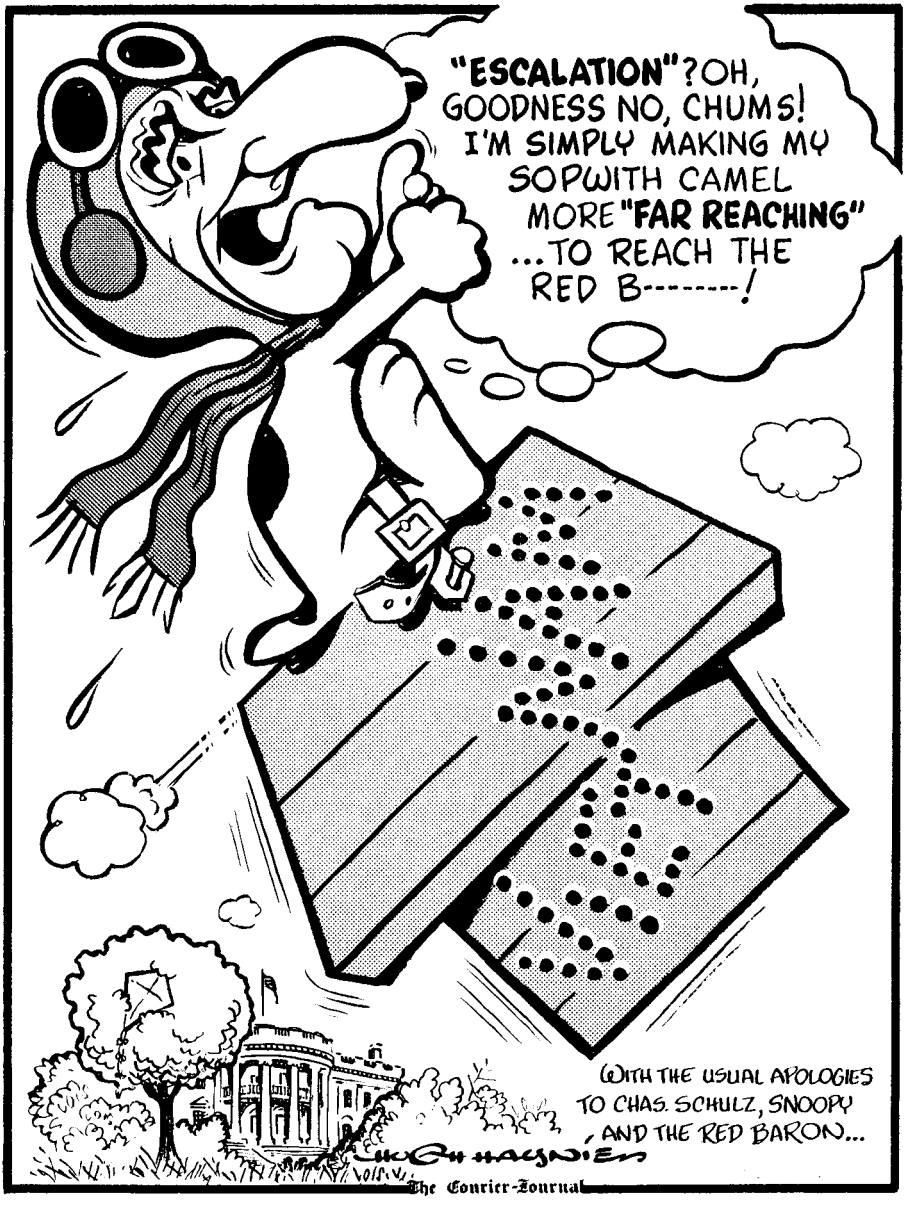
HUGH HAYNIE ...


"ESCALATION"? OH, GOODNESS NO, CHUMS! I'M SIMPLY MAKING MY SOPWITH CAMEL MORE "FAR REACHING" ...TO REACH THE RED B--------!
WITH THE USUAL APOLOGIES TO CHAS. SCHULZ, SNOOPY, AND THE RED BARON...
HAYNIE
The Courier-Journal

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Flotsam & Jetsam

☞ Warren Myers, who oversees European affairs for us from an apartment in Rome, has sent a clipping from the Times of London which indicates that the British are having trouble maintaining their mastery of the English language.

The Times parliamentary correspondent offers numerous examples that prove the point:

One M. P. recently stated to his compatriots: "More of the population are living in cities and towns than in sparsely populated areas."

Another offered this report: "During the night he died, and in the morning, of course, he was dead."

Others noted by the Timesman: "We must protect the police from doing a job which has already been done by

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someone else. "

"Everyone would be the first to say..... "

"What is the answer? That is the question. "

Our own Congressional Record would undoubtedly contain many more such such gems than it does were it not for the fact that congressmen are allowed to expurgate the journal before it goes to press. Still, it is hard to avoid the mixed metaphor or the contorted cliche in this town, as in this recent example offered us by Rep. Emanuel Celler. The congressman sought to warn Negroes against taking revenge in the Adam Clayton Powell case and stated: "If they do what they propose, they will only intensify the backlash and reap the whirlwind."

Charlie McDowell, who spends a good deal of time listening to congressmen stretch the poetic capabilities of the English language, reports this statement from a midwestern congressman back from his district:

"From the way the wind seems to be blowing at the grassroots, I think the country expects us to tighten our belts. "

And McDowell recalls that the late Senator Kenneth Wherry of Nebraska once said: "President Truman has sugar-coated red ink with flights into the wild blue yonder. "

But metaphor is not always essential to beautiful political language. No manufactured image was necessary for the late Senator Olin Johnson to produce this immortal line:

"Trees is our primary source of lumber. "

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